



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

# 'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

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*What have you all been up to? Any chat, photos, news, recent acquisitions etc. by members for future issues please!*

## DR. JOHN DAWSON – R.I.P.

Only nine months ago the lead story on this page was about how Dr. John Dawson had, against all odds, defeated Covid 19. Therefore it is with sad reflection that it must now be announced that John has finally succumbed to ongoing ill health and old age. He passed away peacefully on Wednesday, 10th March 2021, at the age of 87.

John was a founder member of our Society and held the roles of chairman and secretary for many years. He had previously been a member of both the Wigan Numismatic Society and the Liverpool Numismatic Society, where he was usually more formally addressed as “Doctor Dawson”. John was born in the county of Westmoreland in the Lake District and after leaving grammar school he took a degree course in chemistry at Liverpool University. He not only went on to achieve a PhD in the subject but was also voted student of the year and awarded the prestigious Leverhulme prize. His career in the subject led him to work for Fisons, Courtaulds and Pilkington Glass, where he led a team of fifteen in their Lathom based Research & Development facility until switching his career direction to lecturing in chemistry at Tuson College (now Preston College) until he retired.



*Dr. John Dawson 1934-2021*

In his younger days he was always a keen sportsman. John excelled at rugby, cricket and tennis, even qualifying for Wimbledon under 25s! His other recreational pursuits were collecting Scottish silverware and, of course, coins. His numismatic interest settled on the coinage of James I and over the years he built up a comprehensive collection. John was interested in everything. He collected paintings, local ‘Melling’ pottery, books, maps and in fact anything that took his fancy.

The first meeting of the Ormskirk Society was held on 6th June, 1970 and John was a founder member at that meeting, a title of which he was proud. Over the last fifty years John acted as Chairman at many meetings and as a committee member was always a source of sound advice. Seven years ago his health started to deteriorate and he could no longer cope at home. Although he was then confined to a care home in nearby Parbold he still took a keen interest in what was going on in the Ormskirk Society. He was kept up to date with copies of the minutes and, over the last year, the monthly newsletter. Members regularly visited him in the care home and he was always cheerful and seemed settled, however, at the beginning of March his general health took a turn for the worse and this time he was unable to fight it. He is survived by his son and daughter, Ian and Karen, and two grandchildren. John was a larger than life character, both in stature and in his modest and kind persona. He will be sadly missed by all those who had the pleasure of knowing him.

## COIN-THEMED PUBS TO OPEN IN UK

Ten existing pubs and restaurants, including two in the North West, are to be given a themed make-over later this year. The venues, which are all part of a well known High Street brand, are due to become ‘coin pubs’ with the décor themed to coins and tokens from around the world.

In preparation the firm is busy buying up quantities of ‘kiloware’ pre-euro foreign and British pre-decimal coins to make suitable displays. Quite a number of coin dealers and collectors have already been contacted but more ‘old holiday change’ is still needed. If anyone has a quantity of such coins in a drawer at home, and they haven’t already donated it to a charity, then it might be an idea to contact the firm involved in the project. After all, it should certainly raise a public awareness of coins in general, which can’t be a bad thing. For further details contact the O.& W.L.N.S. Secretary.

## BEGINNER'S LUCK - or maybe not?

David Lythgoe

Fifty years ago I was a Sunday School treasurer - a useful job for a coin collector, which is all I was then. I could sift through the pennies and halfpennies brought every Sunday and exchange those in my paltry collection for better ones. Having had a keen interest in history since my childhood, I realised when decimalisation was announced in 1966, that we would be losing circulating currency that covered the reigns of five monarchs. I immediately thought, as no doubt did many others, that it would be a good idea to collect a coin of every denomination for as many years as possible.

A few weeks before D (for Decimal) Day I read a letter in the *Wigan Observer* from the RSPCA local branch treasurer to the effect that she would like anyone interested in purchasing over a thousand halfpennies to contact her. I don't know if anyone else was interested but I bought them all (1104) for face value plus a donation. If nothing else, it would give me pleasure sorting through them – but I wasn't hoping to find a fortune. As I expected, having been in constant circulation, the condition ranged from almost mint for 1967 to illegible for 1896, but I upgraded with a few anyway. The dates in circulation followed a similar pattern with the exception of the decade 1938-47 which I think may be statistically significant. Mintage figures during the early 1940s were much higher than in earlier years. This was probably due to an appraisal of the public's annual demand and use of small change, assessed by feedback from the banks. Also, with the onset of WW2 the Royal Mint must have anticipated that the resulting austerity would see an increase in the use of small denominations – but this is just speculation. I list the halfpennies here in decades starting from the earliest –

Pre 1908 = 10, 1908-1917 = 29, 1918-1927 = 26, 1928-1937 = 51, 1938-1947 = 201, 1948-1957 = 128 and finally 1958-1967 = 633.

In all, 26 coins were damaged, either bent or defaced and three were illegible, with no image at all on either side). There was one Lincoln cent and one 50 groschen. The date 1967 was a ‘frozen’ date for bronze coins, as the same date appeared on Mint output for a number of years prior to decimalisation.



The only memento of decimalisation I kept is this cheap decimal adder. It still works, but who needs one today?

## COINS CAN BE AN INSPIRATION

In the second of two recent articles about collecting coins, *BBC News* asked viewers and listeners to share their experiences as collectors. After collectors from all age groups got in touch it soon became apparent that there was much more pleasure to be gained from the pursuit than just the financial aspect.

The consensus of opinion was that coins, both British and foreign, old and new and of any denomination, have the collective potential to educate people in history, geography and economics, at the same time being an absorbing and pleasurable pastime. People's reasons for collecting were as diverse as the coins themselves, but with most it was for the variety of designs, the different era, scarcity and distant cultures – with financial gain coming low on the list.



## THE IRONSIDES' SECRET

In commemoration of fifty years since the full change over to decimal currency in the UK the British Museum has put on a special display. The exhibition aims to show how the original designs for the coins came about, through the work of Hampshire artist Christopher Ironside. The late designer's family has revealed that while he was working on the iconic designs the whole subject of the new coin designs was kept

in strict secrecy for nearly six years. Ironside's family have talked about the strain of keeping all his designs secret before they were officially revealed, first in 1968 then fully in 1971, but also their immense pride when all the coins were finally in the public domain. The exhibition displays the artist's preliminary sketches and plaster cast working models of the coins.

## COIN QUIZ No.12

- QUESTION 1. Why is a Scottish 'Bawbee' so called?
- QUESTION 2. From what does the abbreviation £. s. d. derive?
- QUESTION 3. What was the word 'slug' used to describe?
- QUESTION 4. What year did English copper coinage change to bronze?
- QUESTION 5. When were 'Cronwall type' gold thrymsas issued?
- QUESTION 6. Why is a James I gold 'laurel' so called?
- QUESTION 7. In whose reign was the silver groat first minted?
- QUESTION 8. When was a 20p coin issued, in error, without a date?
- QUESTION 9. What does W.C.C. stand for on some George I shillings?

### ANSWERS (Quiz No.11)

- Q1. Black Money is a term used for base silver pennies or jettons which imitate silver coins.
- Q2. Chuckram (Hind. Chackram) was a small silver coin used in Southern India.
- Q3. Mudie's 40 medals commemorate victory over Napoleon, they were issued in 1820.
- Q4. The first English silver florin is dated 1849
- Q5. The Perkin Warbeck groat bears the date 1494, the date of his failed invasion.
- Q6. Charles II chose to have his portrait facing to the right, because Cromwell's portrait faced left. He was then seen to be turning his back on the Commonwealth era.
- Q7. The 'rose noble' or ryal was introduced in 1464, during the first reign of Edward IV.
- Q8. Obeloi was the ancient Greek term used for bundles of pre-coinage iron spits or rods used in trade.
- Q9. Of the various theories about the origin of the dollar symbol, the most accepted is the /8/ contraction for peso or piece of eight.
- Q10. Richard Cyril Lockett (1873-1950) whose massive collection of coins was auctioned in the 1950s and early 1960s.



QUESTION 10. Can you name this American collector of English coins and tokens?



## USELESS COIN FACTS No.12

The basic economic principle that coins must be easily handled to be accepted as a unit of exchange seems to have been ignored by the Swedish Government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Huge flat and square copper plates, some weighing as much as 44lbs (nearly 20 kilograms) were stamped with coin-like roundels showing the value of the copper in silver dalers. The largest of these 'plate coins' was valued at 10 dalers and measured an incredible 13 x 27 inches ( 33 x 68.5cm) Most plates have four corner stamps bearing the name or initials of the current monarch, and some with the abbreviated words SILF:MYNT literally meaning 'silver money'. With wheelbarrows and carts needed to transport quantities of such a heavy and impractical currency the Bank of Sweden soon issued transportation notes if a deposit in copper plates was made to the value stated on the note. Eventually these notes circulated in place of the cumbersome plates. The ten daler plate is regarded as the largest 'coin' ever minted by any government for circulation. In the 1980s the wreck of the trading ship *Nicobar*, which went down in 1783, was located off the west coast of Africa. In the hold was approximately 3,000 Swedish plate coins of various denominations. Today, there are around 11,000 known examples – but none would fit either a standard coin packet or cabinet!

## CARDECUES – ILLEGAL TENDER OR NOT?

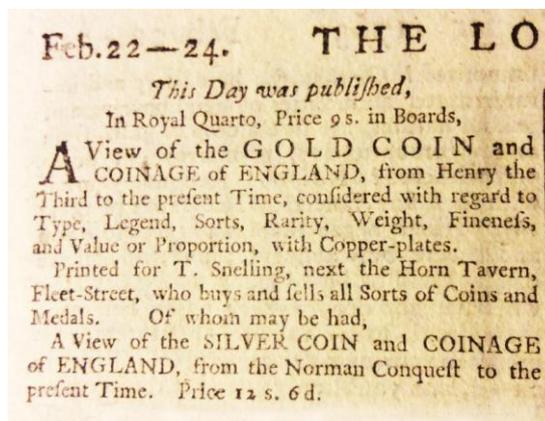
Chris Leather

In the January issue of Lockdown Newsletter, Peter's article on foreign coins circulating in England mentioned the *cardecue* or French *quart d'ecu*, which was declared legal tender in 1625 and then demonetised in July the following year.

This is certainly the legal position, but the coins obviously continued to circulate. Edward Besley, in his book *Coins & Medals of the English Civil War (2019 edition)* records a case from Preston in 1627 where a stolen purse contained, amongst other things, three cardecues. But more significant is the fact that on 4th March 1644 a proclamation was issued from Oxford by Charles I in which he legitimised a number of foreign coins, and specifying minimum weights and a legal value; among these were cardecues, which were given a minimum weight of 6dwt and a value of 18d. Besley also notes that an assay carried out at the Mint in 1651 found that the cardecues in circulation had a bullion value of 19d.

## THE HIGH PRICE OF KNOWLEDGE

The worst time-wasting thing you can do, when sorting through things you have kept over the years, is to read old newspapers. This is especially true when the paper in question is the *London Chronicle*, dated February 22nd to 24th 1763. As with the content of most newspapers of the time it is mainly concerned with what was happening in the Royal Court, the comings and goings of ships in the pool of London and who had drowned in the river.



The advert as it appeared in the London Chronicle of February 1763

But, amongst some small adverts on the inside pages one caught my eye immediately. It was a publisher's announcement of a new book on *Gold Coinage of England* by T. Snelling, but what really did surprise me was the price – nine shillings! A colossal amount of money to pay for a book in those days. The advert went on to state that the companion volume on *England's Silver Coinage* was also available at 12s 6d! That would have bought a George III half guinea of that year in mint state! Spink's current yearbook values the coin at £6,500 in EF. On the other hand, numerous copies of the first edition of Snelling's book on silver coins are still available for under £400.



## PROVENANCE IS EVERYTHING?

Chris Leather

In the last year or two, partly due to excellent talks at our Society meetings, I have become interested in the coinage circulating and struck during the English Civil Wars of the 1640s, and I now have a few carefully selected examples in a small collection. In January 2021, I acquired a halfcrown of the Bristol mint, dated 1644, which appeared on Ebay and was sold with several 'old dealers' tickets' which were illustrated, but without any comments regarding provenance.

Interested in the coin, I decided to do a little research. The tickets which came with the coin contained a little information, but the availability of material on-line allows the construction of a much more complete picture. The story is probably best appreciated when told logically, starting at the beginning, though there wasn't much trace of order in the compilation!

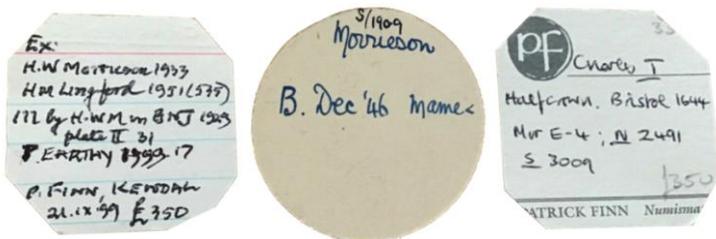
The first of the tickets, a square of white card with the corners trimmed, stated that the coin had come from H W Morrieson. After retiring from the Royal Artillery in 1905, Lt Col Henry Walters Morrieson (1857-1933) devoted himself to numismatics, was President of the British Numismatic Society 1915-1919, and 1928-1932, and contributed four papers to the British Numismatic Journal on the coins of the Civil War mints of Charles I, one of which was on the Bristol mint. The ticket dated this, incorrectly, to 1929; the paper actually appeared in BNJ volume 18, 1925-26. My coin featured as a plate coin in this article, definitely establishing the link to Lt Col Morrieson.

The collection was sold at auction by Sotheby's in November 1933, following Morrieson's death earlier in the year, and at this point there is a gap in the trail. I haven't been able to establish who bought the piece; although a named and priced auction catalogue was sold in America some years ago the details do not seem to have been published. However, given the next part of the story it would not be surprising to find that it had been bought by Baldwins.



Charles I halfcrown, 1644, of the Bristol mint (obverse and reverse)

The next attribution is to the collection of H M Lingford (1891-1950), a manufacturer of baking powder, from Barnard Castle. Lingford was extremely wealthy, and bought many of his pieces from Baldwins. An account by Peter Mitchell reported that in 1938 Lingford had sent Baldwins a cheque for £3,700 'in the hope you can send me some coins!' Mitchell recounted that 'you didn't leave the office until a parcel had gone to Lingford.' The second ticket supplied with my coin is Lingford's own ticket which contains little information other than it was ex-Morrieson, the date December 1946, and an enigmatic letter 'B' which might mean 'bought' or it might mean 'Baldwins.'



Collection tickets accompanying the halfcrown

For whatever reason, Lingford committed suicide at Easter 1950, and Baldwins purchased his collection en bloc, which then disappeared into the famous (notorious?) 'vault' in the basement of their premises. Material might remain there for days, weeks, months, years or decades – as late as the 1970s, the Ashmolean museum bought 136 coins of Henry VII from the Lingford collection.

At some point my coin entered the collection of Peter Earthy, a name not well known, but nonetheless a significant player in the market for civil war coins, as well as historical and commemorative medallions. His coin collection was sold anonymously through the dealer Patrick Finn, and my coin appeared in his list 17 of September 1999 as item 337. The third ticket supplied is Finn's stock ticket.

The first ticket, the white square with the clipped corners, brings everything together neatly and completes the story. Though there is no indication on it, I recognised it (as I have a couple of others) as being from the collection of the late Dr John Hulett (1929-2017) whose enormous collection of hammered silver was sold by Dix Noonan Webb in an amazing series of twenty separate auctions from 2017 to 2020, my coin being lot 67 in the sale of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The ticket shows that Hulett bought the piece from Finn on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1999.

It would be very interesting to know more of where the coin had been from 1644 until its appearance in the Morrieson collection, but I suspect that unless I am very lucky in further research, it will remain a mystery.

*Q. Why should we think of the last year's lockdown and subsequent restrictions as a scene from a pantomime? A. Because now 'it's behind you!'*

**Why didn't Mary and Joseph make it back from Bethlehem? Because all Virgin flights were cancelled**

## BRASHER DUBLOON SETS RECORD

American auctions attract bidders who are somewhat notorious for going over the top at coin sales, none more so than at the recent Heritage Auction offering of the excessively rare 1787 'Brasher' dubloon. The coin offered was claimed to be the finest of seven known examples and came with an interesting provenance.

The coin was originally acquired by numismatist Matthew Strickney in 1848. It was then offered for sale at auction in 1907 when it made a staggering \$6,200 being a world record at the time for an American coin. It next went to auction as part of the Garrett Collection in 1979, when it realised \$725,000 – another record price. This time it has smashed all world records by achieving the incredible selling price of \$9,360,000 or £6,882,325!



The 1787 Brasher dubloon (obverse and reverse)

The coin itself was privately minted in, or just after, 1787 by Ephraim Brasher, a goldsmith and silversmith. Brasher over stamped the small quantity of gold coins he made with his initials EB. They were all 22ct fine gold. As far as the quality of the engraved dies is concerned it is certainly not the finest example of coin design and the actual engraving is rather substandard in some places. Yet, in spite of these shortcomings, it has proved to be a most desirable icon of early American gold coinage. Interestingly, the coin was the subject of author Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe mystery *The High Window*, which was made into a film *The Brasher Dubloon* in 1947.

## AN ODE TO THE LONELY COLLECTOR

Martin Perry

This original 'limerick' reveals the fact that enthusiasm for collecting coins is very much a personal thing.

*A keen collector of milled,  
When his cabinet almost was filled  
Said "I'll now start on hammered,  
I might get enamoured"  
But his wife said "Oh really, I'm thrilled"*

If anyone else would like to try their hand at writing a 'numismatic limerick' we could vote for the best in a future issue (there could even be a prize for the winner!) Emails to [mail@numsoc.net](mailto:mail@numsoc.net)

## 1797 - A MOMENTOUS YEAR

Chris Leather

The year 1797 was a momentous one for the British coinage. It wasn't as if the year had started with change in the air, but the war with France, which had been draining British efforts and finances, was going badly and there was fear of an invasion from the continent - not that anyone really believed it would happen.

Happen it did, however, and a French force of 1,400 landed at Fishguard on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Word of the invasion quickly reached London, and started a 'run' on the Bank of England, with holders of the Bank's notes seeking payment in gold. The invading forces, consisting principally of 'spare' French soldiers, former deserters and criminals, officered by Irish officers with the odd American, surrendered unconditionally on 24<sup>th</sup> February, but the run on the Bank quickly developed into a full-scale crisis of confidence, so-much-so that, on 26<sup>th</sup> February, Prime Minister Pitt took the step of ordering the Bank to cease cash payments of its notes. Whether this instruction was illegal, or simply beyond his authority, it was obeyed, and later ratified by Parliament. The populace was encouraged to keep calm, and carry on, and remarkably it worked.

There remained a serious problem however. With Bank payments suspended, gold rapidly disappeared from circulation. There were no English bank notes for less than five pounds, and the silver coinage, scarce and worn-out as it was, could not stand the strain. Nearly all of the copper in circulation comprised forgeries of regal issues, and large numbers of private tokens. As a result, there were no satisfactory means of making any kind of payment of less than five pounds, and as this affected everyone in the country, not just the poor, the Government decided that Something Must Be Done. Indeed it was, and at a speed quite unknown otherwise at that time.

By the first week of March, the Bank of England, and other English banks had been given legal authority to issue notes of less than five pounds, and one- and two-pound notes rapidly appeared. The Bank had a large quantity of Spanish and Spanish American 8-Real coins in their vaults, and they were authorised to have these countermarked at the Royal Mint and issued as tokens. On 5<sup>th</sup> March the first batch was sent to the Mint, and received back on 6<sup>th</sup> March with a small head of George III, from the silver duty mark applied at the Assay Offices, struck on the Spanish King's neck. By 9<sup>th</sup> March, these were being issued in quantity to the public at a valuation of 4/9d - hence the expression 'two kings' heads not worth a crown.'

On Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, Lord Liverpool had written to Matthew Boulton suggesting that if he was interested in a contract to strike a new copper coinage he should arrive in London PDQ. On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup>, Boulton left Birmingham, and was in London by Monday morning, 6<sup>th</sup> March. His meetings with Government in the afternoon went well, and by the end of March Royal Assent had been obtained for a new copper coinage, contracts issued, and work started on the production of copper penny and two penny pieces - the famous 'Cartwheels.'

During the next few months, the Royal Mint produced 2,300,000 countermarked Spanish dollars which relieved some of the strain on the existing means of payment. By June, Boulton delivered the first of the Cartwheel pennies, due at the rate of twenty tons a week - out of a grand total of nearly 44 million coins which would be struck before the end of production the following year.

By the autumn of 1797, the political pressures as well as the economic, were easing. The failure of the rather farcical invasion at Fishguard had put some spirit into the national body, and the acceptance of small denomination bank notes had eased the payment situation. So much so that while official convertibility of notes for gold was not restored until 1822, a new, small, gold coin of 7 shillings value, one third of a guinea, could be introduced to replace the silver dollars which had proved all too easy to fake, with consequent losses to the Bank when they were redeemed. So by the end of 1797, it really was a case of 'all change!'

## COIN & NOTE USE DOWN BY A FIFTH

A recent survey has revealed that, since the onset of the Covid pandemic restrictions, the public's use of banknotes and coins has fallen by roughly a fifth compared with other years. This is hardly surprising, as currency coins and notes can host more germs than a lavatory seat. Also, the upsurge in the use of contactless card payments has impacted on areas where small purchases would have previously been cash.

## WHEN LOSERS WRITE THE HISTORY

For collectors of Greek coins and students of Greek history the summer of 480 BC is a key historical date. This was when the *Battle of Thermopylae* saw the heroic '300' Spartan hoplites supposedly delay the advance of the entire Persian army for three days in the narrow pass at Thermopylae in northern Greece. Heavily outnumbered, the Greeks held off the Persians for seven days in total, including three in bloody hand-to-hand fighting. Acting as rearguard for the retreating Greek army, comprising about 7000 men from a number of Greek city states, the Spartans, led by their King Leonidas, were finally annihilated due to treachery and the sheer force of numbers in the advancing Persian horde in what was to become one of history's most famous last stands.

As with all the famous battles of history there has to be two opposing sides, with usually the victor writing the account for posterity and the loser either vilified or just fading from the historical record. The Persian invasion was in response to a failed first attempt by Darius the Great in 500 BC, which ended in a decisive victory for the Athenians at the equally famous *Battle of Marathon*. So this was the Persian Achaemenid Empire's second invasion of the Greek mainland; this time led by Darius' son and successor Xerxes I.

Being the fourth of the so-called Achaemenid 'King of Kings', Xerxes ruled his empire at the very apex of their territorial gains. Flushed with the power of conquest after securing most of the Middle East from Egypt to the Balkans, Xerxes was determined to finally bring the whole of Greece under his control. He amassed a truly formidable army, comprising men from most of the conquered territories and estimated by some ancient writers to number more than a million, although a more accurate estimate would probably be about 60,000 to 100,000. Nevertheless, this was a formidable enemy of highly trained and disciplined fighters.

Xerxes certainly had a victory at Thermopylae, albeit short lived, as then, emboldened by his success, he disregarded sound strategical advice resulting in the Persian fleet being destroyed at the *Battle of Salamis*. This ended the Persian invasion and the army withdrew to Thassaly for the winter, after which they abandoned any further attempts to conquer Greece and returned home to subdue uprisings in Babylon and Egypt.



Silver siglos of Xerxes, c.518-465 BC (2:1)

Persian coins of this period consist mainly of the gold *daric*, named after Xerxes' father Darius, and the silver *siglos*. The obverse of these typically small and chunky coins shows the Persian king in a kneeling-running position, holding a spear, bow and quiver of arrows. Various bankers' marks are often found on the obverse field. The reverse, as with many early Greek coins, consists of a simple irregular incuse shape. The design of both the gold *daric* and *siglos* is more or less the same; the only difference being the metal - and scarcity. Being stamped on a round pellet of silver the obverse of the *siglos* is frequently slightly off-centre, resulting in the king's bow being off the flan. These coins occasionally appear for sale and are generally not overly expensive. It is worth remembering that the Spartans did not issue coins at this time, as they thought the whole concept of a monetary economy and individual accumulated wealth was both effeminate and a distraction from training for warfare. Despite these dogged opinions they did conduct trade with other city states by using a form of proto-currency; namely bundles of iron spits - and of course barter. Therefore, this small silver coin of Xerxes stands alone in offering the collector the only affordable and tangible link with one of the most memorable events in ancient history.

As a footnote: A cinema film titled '300' was made in 2006 in co-operation with the Greek Government. The storyline is somewhat embellished for the screen but graphically it powerfully portrays the valor, stoicism and self sacrifice that had inspired future generations throughout the world.

The next issue of 'Lockdown Newsletter' will be May 2021. Anyone with anything to say is welcome to contribute, as each issue is presenting more of a challenge to fill with suitable articles and numismatic news items.